

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**DIEPPE 1942: RECONNAISSANCE IN FORCE WITH STRATEGIC OVERTONES**

by

Colonel Lewis M. Boone  
United States Army

Professor Brian D. Moore  
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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## ABSTRACT

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In the early hours of August 19, 1942 an amphibious force of approximately 6000 troops, primarily Canadians of the 2nd Infantry Division, approached the coast of France. Their destination was the small port of Dieppe and their mission was to foster German fear of an attack in the West and compel them to strengthen their Channel defenses at the expense of other operational areas. Their secondary purpose was to learn as much as possible about new techniques and equipment and gain experience and knowledge necessary for a future great amphibious assault. By early afternoon, 807 Canadians lay dead in and around Dieppe. Another 100 would die of wounds, and in captivity, and about 1900 more would sit out the rest of the war in POW camps. The intent of this paper is not to refight the battle in detail, but to examine the strategic implications of the raid in terms of future operations by the Allies. This paper will also inform the reader on the utility of the mission given the tragic loss of life that day. Historians still debate whether Dieppe was a "needless slaughter" or a precursor for success at Normandy on 6 June 1944.



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## DIEPPE 1942: RECONNAISSANCE IN FORCE WITH STRATEGIC OVERTONES

“Too large to be a symbol, too small to be a success.”

—Lord Haw Haw, German propagandist  
commenting on the Dieppe raid

The raid on the small coastal town of Dieppe, France in August of 1942 represents to most readers of history, the epitome of failure. The story of Dieppe still evokes controversy among historians even today and much has been written about this relatively small engagement of World War II. The reasons why the raid on Dieppe failed at the tactical level are not difficult to discern. The question is: was anything learned by it and if so, was it applied by the Allies to future operations such as HUSKY in Sicily or Operation OVERLORD in Normandy?

Many believe the courage and sacrifice of an untested Canadian infantry division on 19 August, 1942 paid major strategic dividends, particularly on D-Day. Still others suggest it was a failure of leadership and a tragic waste of life with lessons that could have been learned in training. Even the characterization of the raid as a “reconnaissance in force” by Winston Churchill was steeped in controversy. It is not surprising that both sides claimed victory in varying degrees, the Germans in the near term, and the Allies in future battles. Lord Louis Mountbatten, the acknowledged strategic leader of the raid, defended its utility from a score of journalists, biographers, and veterans of the raid, until his assassination in 1979. Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery was spared most of the controversy as much of the documentation of the raid was still protected under the Official Secrets Act prior to his death. Finally, by most accounts, Major General J.H. “Ham” Roberts, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division commander, unfairly bore the responsibility for Dieppe’s failure, all the while choosing not to become involved in the controversy. A closer examination in this paper of the consequences surrounding the raid on Dieppe will show that there were indeed some successes by the Allies on that fateful day and that lessons learned from Dieppe carried over to history’s largest amphibious assault on 6 June 1944.

### THE STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE: SPRING 1942

The Allied situation in the spring of 1942 was grim. The Germans had penetrated deep into Russia, the British Eighth Army in North Africa had been forced back into Egypt and in Western Europe, the Allied forces faced the Germans across the English Channel.<sup>1</sup> German U-Boats were still exacting a terrible toll sending hundreds of thousands of tons of shipping to the

bottom of the sea while Joseph Stalin was demanding that the Allies open a second front in the West to relieve the Russians from the German onslaught. Strategically, the Allies understood the dire consequences should Russia succumb to the Germans in the East. A negotiated settlement and the shift of German forces to the West, would at the least, extend the war for several more years. Great Britain's reaction since the fall of France in 1940 had been to conduct a series of small intelligence-gathering and harassing raids along the coast of France and Norway, none of which achieved any significant military objective. These raids, some as small as several individual commandos, seemed to raise morale in Britain and were intended to show the Nazis that Allied forces could return to the continent whenever it suited them.

In October 1941, Admiral Louis Mountbatten replaced Sir Roger Keyes as head of the British Combined Operations Headquarters and immediately set about focusing on planning a significant raid in size that would in his words, "give the Allies the priceless secret of victory." That is, a raid that would inform the Allies on how to conduct an eventual attack on the continent that would lead to eventual victory. Early in 1942, following the United States Chiefs of Staff joining with their British counterparts to become the Combined Chiefs of Staff, a directive issued to Combined Operations stated: "Raids in force designed to obtain information and experience in the enemy's defense system are to be pressed forward as opportunities arise."<sup>2</sup> This directive fit in nicely with Lord Mountbatten's proactive agenda and ultimately it would come to justify the raid on Dieppe by being a good rehearsal for both SLEDGEHAMMER (the contingency to attack in France if Germany collapsed in Russia, or vice versa) and ROUNDUP, a plan strongly advocated by the American contingent to land in France in early 1943.<sup>3</sup>

Mountbatten selected as his chief staff officer and planner, a 40-year old Royal Navy officer, Captain John Hughes-Hallett. A paradoxically complex yet concise, clear-thinking officer, Hughes-Hallett conceived the two great raids which contributed so much to the invasions of North Africa and Normandy. Because the second raid (Dieppe) would not have taken place if the first had been unsuccessful, the incredibly daring attack on the French Biscayan base of St. Nazaire is an essential ingredient of the Dieppe story.<sup>4</sup>

## THE RAID ON ST. NAZaire

On March 27, 1942, a force of approximately 630 sailors and commandos set sail for St. Nazaire, France. The plan for Operation CHARIOT was to breach the harbor defenses and ram an obsolete American Lend-Lease destroyer, the HMS Campbelltown, loaded with five tons of high explosives into the locks that controlled water flow into the dry dock area.

Accomplishing this would destroy the U-boat pens, a key component of the St. Nazaire port facilities. While the latter portion of the raid was taking place, British commandos would disembark and destroy the pumping facilities in the port. The force successfully accomplished its mission, however at great cost in personnel. Of the approximately 300 plus commandos who went ashore, 109 were captured, half being wounded. Another 100 commandos made it back to the ship safely, but half of these were also wounded. The HMS Campbelltown, which was configured with a time fuse, exploded the following day killing 380 Germans, including 60 officers.<sup>5</sup>

In retrospect, the St. Nazaire raid served two purposes: first, it dealt a severe blow to the German surface raiding capability by trapping the German battleship Tirpitz in its Norwegian berth. As the plan's rationale went, if the Tirpitz, whose every movement was closely monitored by the Allies was to embark on surface raiding missions in the North Atlantic, British naval assets stood prepared to slip in and seal off its Norwegian base near Tromso. The only port in the hands of the Germans capable of berthing a warship of this size for sustainment purposes, was St. Nazaire. (St. Nazaire was the pre-war homeport of the French liner Normandy). The resulting destruction of the port facilities at St. Nazaire had strategic implications. On March 30, 1942 the day following the raid, the mighty German battleship lay virtually immobile in her Norwegian hideout. The ability of the Germans to maintain any capital ship in the Atlantic was destroyed, and with it came an end to surface raids on the convoy routes.<sup>6</sup>

The second purpose of the St. Nazaire raid gave the Allies the impetus to continue planning future raids on ports where practical. The results seemed to indicate that an attack on a defended port was in fact possible and would be successful given the right circumstances. Because landing craft of any type for an invasion were in short supply, and would be for the foreseeable future, another assault on a port had a definite appeal to Combined Operations Command. Much more needed to be learned concerning these operations. One of the "raiding programs" scheduled raids called for a simultaneous assault on six ports stretching from Calais to Boulogne. This quite naturally called for much more experience in amphibious assaults and soon, studies were initiated to examine likely candidates for the next raid. The complete destruction of the facility at St. Nazaire and the resultant propaganda benefits seemed to overshadow the fact that casualties sustained were not insignificant and much stock was placed in the belief that if surprise and shock effect were present, future raids on a port might provide the logistical lodgment needed for a large-scale assault on the continent. St. Nazaire by most accounts was chalked up as a success, however the Allies needed to know much more about German defenses and concurrent with the raiding program, they began to discuss even bolder,

larger, and more complex landings. Sir Winston Churchill, commenting on the Dieppe raid remarked in his memoirs, "Military opinion seemed unanimous that until an operation on that scale (Dieppe) was undertaken, no responsible General would take the responsibility of planning for the main invasion."<sup>7</sup> The stage was now set for what became known as Operation RUTTER.

### **OPERATION RUTTER: BLUEPRINT FOR CATASTROPHE**

Captain Hughes-Hallett and his target committee at Combined Operations Headquarters first considered the idea of an attack on Dieppe in April 1942. The Germans had been building up the coastal defenses of France ever since their defeat in the Battle of Britain. Many French ports still held the Nazi invasion barges, but as the Nazi hopes of invading Britain had dwindled, their fears had increased. The constant talk of a second front urged them to ever-greater efforts to make the Channel coast impregnable.<sup>8</sup> Planning responsibility for Operation RUTTER came to Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ) through an arrangement that occurred one month earlier. Normally, raiding and amphibious operations were the responsibility of Combined Operations Headquarters, however, the raiding directive of 1941 (mentioned earlier) gave execution authority to Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces was General Sir Bernard Paget, who for reasons unexplained, allowed Lord Mountbatten, now Chief of Combined Operations Headquarters, to assume responsibility for the planning and conduct of the raid. The one condition that Paget required was that Mountbatten incorporate a fair portion of Home Forces in any major raids. As such, the command and control and much of the early planning would involve the South-Eastern Command, commanded by a not-yet-famous General Bernard Montgomery. Canadian forces in England came under the control of South-Eastern Command. Despite the fact that the first Canadian officer in the chain-of-command was General A.G.L. McNaughton, Montgomery first approached McNaughton's subordinate, First Corps Commander, General H.D.G. Crerar. Montgomery proposed that the Canadians be the predominant force in any planned attack, and of course, Crerar, seeing an opportunity to involve restless Canadian troops, agreed.

"Montgomery knew that Crerar was desperately keen to see his men in action under almost any circumstances, while McNaughton, preoccupied with national concerns favored a more cautious approach which reflected Prime Minister MacKenzie King's anxiety to avoid squandering Canadian lives and so keep Canada's conscription issue off the political agenda."<sup>9</sup> Montgomery also became involved in the planning aspect of RUTTER, and as such would come to be responsible for one of the most debated issues surrounding the Dieppe raid: the decision

to incorporate a “frontal assault” in the plan. Upon choosing Dieppe as the next location for a raid, the COHQ planners proposed double flank attacks, with a parachute/glider operation to the rear of Dieppe to seal off the town and destroy the coastal batteries. The “Two-Tide operation,” an operation in which the tide would come in and go out twice, would include approximately seven battalions of troops and commandos plus a battalion of tanks to be landed six miles to the West of Dieppe. These forces would move toward the airborne forces and consolidate at the port. Montgomery disagreed forcefully with this course of action. He rejected the “flanks only” plan on the ground that there would be no time and too many obstacles for the tanks to cover the distance between flank-landing beaches and the port before the Germans could summon overwhelming reinforcements. “To assault and capture a port quickly, he said, both troops and tanks would have to go in over the main beaches confronting the town, relying on heavy bombardment and surprise to neutralize the defenses.”<sup>10</sup> Mountbatten and Hughes-Hallett being Naval officers, felt it was not their place to argue against an Army officer, certainly not one with the growing reputation of General Montgomery. Air Vice Marshall Leigh Mallory, designated as the air commander for the raid, also agreed with the two Naval officers, but to no avail. The frontal assault on Dieppe was retained. A summary of the outline plan’s main tactical objectives for RUTTER included:

- Destroy enemy defenses in the vicinity of Dieppe
- Destroy the aerodrome installations at St. Aubin
- Destroy the RDF (radar) stations, power stations, dock and rail facilities, and petrol dumps in the vicinity
- Remove invasion barges for Allied use
- Remove secret documents from the divisional headquarters at Arques-La Bataille
- Capture prisoners

Note: The Official British History lists 16 total tactical objectives

Naval forces were to consist of six small destroyers, a shallow draft steam gunboat, HMS Locust, seven infantry landing ships, and a miscellaneous collection of motor gunboats, steam gunboats, armed motor launches, and assorted assault landing craft. The air forces were to comprise five squadrons of support fighters, one squadron of fighter-bombers, and sufficient bombers to produce extensive bombardment on selected areas and targets. The air component would also consist of carrying aircraft for parachute troops, and tugs for gliders.<sup>11</sup>

In early June, two fateful modifications to the approved outline plan for RUTTER were incorporated that would stir controversy to this very day.

First, the official British Naval Staff History states:

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June a modification to the plan was introduced. It was decided, at a meeting between the executive of Combined Operations, the Force Commanders and General Montgomery, to abandon the high-level bombing of Dieppe on air and military grounds. The Air Force Commander was of the opinion that the bombing of the port itself during the night prior to the assault would not be the most profitable way to use bombers and might only result in putting the enemy on alert. The Military Committee took the view that the destruction of large numbers of houses and the setting of a considerable portion of the town on fire would probably prevent the tanks from operating in streets choked with debris...The bombardment was now to be limited to the 4-inch guns of six destroyers, and the 250 pound bombs of the Hurricane fighter-bombers.<sup>12</sup>

The second fateful decision was to forgo augmenting the raiding force with heavy naval gunfire 'Mountbatten had asked the Admiralty for a battleship to support the raid...even if the risk had been deemed too great to imperil such major units such as HMS King George V or HMS Duke of York, lying at Gibraltar was HMS Malaya, of 1915 vintage and thus too slow (at 20 knots) for fleet operations, but still with eight 15-inch guns. Nevertheless, the response of the First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound (perhaps recalling the fate of HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse, while forgetting that they had been caught without any air cover at all) was unequivocal. 'A battleship in the Channel! Dicky, you must be mad!'<sup>13</sup>

Admiral Baillie-Grohman, the Naval Task Force Commander expressed his concern as well.

"Admiral Baillie-Grohman would have liked a battleship to have been made available, but it was explained to him that one of the purposes of the raid was to provide a success- or what could be represented as a success- to hearten public opinion after the shocks it had endured in the last six months. Whatever happened, the operation could not have been represented as a success had a battleship been lost by a mine or otherwise in the confined waters off Dieppe."<sup>14</sup>

RUTTER continued to suffer setbacks, particularly involving weather conditions. The operation was scheduled for execution any time after 24 June, however weather conditions did not prove suitable, especially for parachute operations. On 5 July, General Montgomery received some ominous news. Intelligence indicated that the 10<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, one of the Wehrmacht's finest, had been transferred from the Eastern Front and was now laagered in Amiens, a mere 40 miles from Dieppe. The first step was to change the operation from a "Two-Tide" operation, to a "One-Tide." This would reduce the amount of time the raiding force would spend ashore and provide an additional measure of safety from a potential movement by reinforcing armored forces from Amiens. As the latest target date, 7 July, approached with no appreciable change in weather conditions, COHQ planners began discussing cancellation of the mission. The final blow to RUTTER came early on the morning of 7 July when a formation of German Focke-Wulf 190 fighters attacked Yarmouth Roads, Isle of Wight, where ships destined

for Dieppe lay berthed with troops already embarked for the raid. Two LSI's (Landing Ship Infantry), HMS Princess Astrid and HMS Princess Josephine Charlotte, were damaged, the latter severely. Miraculously, only few casualties resulted from the attack. The most serious aspect being the damage to the two landing vessels, which were in short supply. Official cancellation of RUTTER occurred on 8 July. "As some 6000 men, with varying degrees of knowledge of the plan, returned to the barracks and pubs of Britain on 8 July, General Montgomery recommended to his superiors that the raid be cancelled for good."<sup>15</sup> In Montgomery's view, an operation of this size would certainly be compromised. Mountbatten saw things differently.

#### **OPERATION RUTTER REBORN AS "JUBILEE"**

With the cancellation of Operation RUTTER, Winston Churchill wrote later of that July in 1942, "I was politically at my weakest and without a glimmer of military success."<sup>16</sup> "The Russians were still retreating; Rommel was poised on the threshold of Egypt and there was no way of knowing that he had, in fact, shot his bolt; the Japanese were pressing through Burma towards India; shipping losses in the Atlantic totaled more than 400,000 tons; Stalin was berating the democracies for not opening a second front and the public clamor for it was developing into a trans-Atlantic crescendo."<sup>17</sup> Churchill had also narrowly survived a vote of confidence in the House of Commons during the previous month on his conduct of managing the war and his relationship with the United States was under severe stress owing to the recent shelving of the SLEDGEHAMMER plan. With the cancellation of Operation RUTTER, the prospect of stalemate in the war for the remainder of 1942 hung heavily over the Allies.

If the decision to conduct a frontal assault was considered the first historical controversy in tale of the raid on Dieppe, then certainly its regeneration as "OPERATION JUBILEE" was the second most mentioned issue. Most historical accounts note that even before RUTTER was cancelled, the British Chiefs of Staff had kept their options open by approving Admiral Mountbatten's suggestion of 6 July that recommended remounting the raid if it were cancelled. At the other extreme, Brian Loring Villa's controversial 1989 work on the Dieppe raid made as its central theme that Admiral Mountbatten took "Unauthorized Action," (the actual book title) in deciding to remount the raid. Villa's work squarely placed blame on Mountbatten for the raid ever taking place and noted that neither Winston Churchill or the British Chief's of Staff gave approval to remounting the raid. Regardless of which position one takes, the raid was in fact brought back to life.

On 10 July, only three days after RUTTER's cancellation, a COHQ meeting presided over by Mountbatten agreed that 'an alternative RUTTER should be examined,' and the next morning, according to Hughes-Hallett, 'at a meeting attended only by Mountbatten, Leigh-Mallory, General Roberts and myself' it was: ...virtually decided to remount the Dieppe raid with slight modifications to the plan, and carry it out on or about August 18...nothing was put in writing, but General Ismay (Churchill's military secretary) informed the Chief's of Staff and the Prime Minister, who gave their verbal approval.<sup>18</sup>

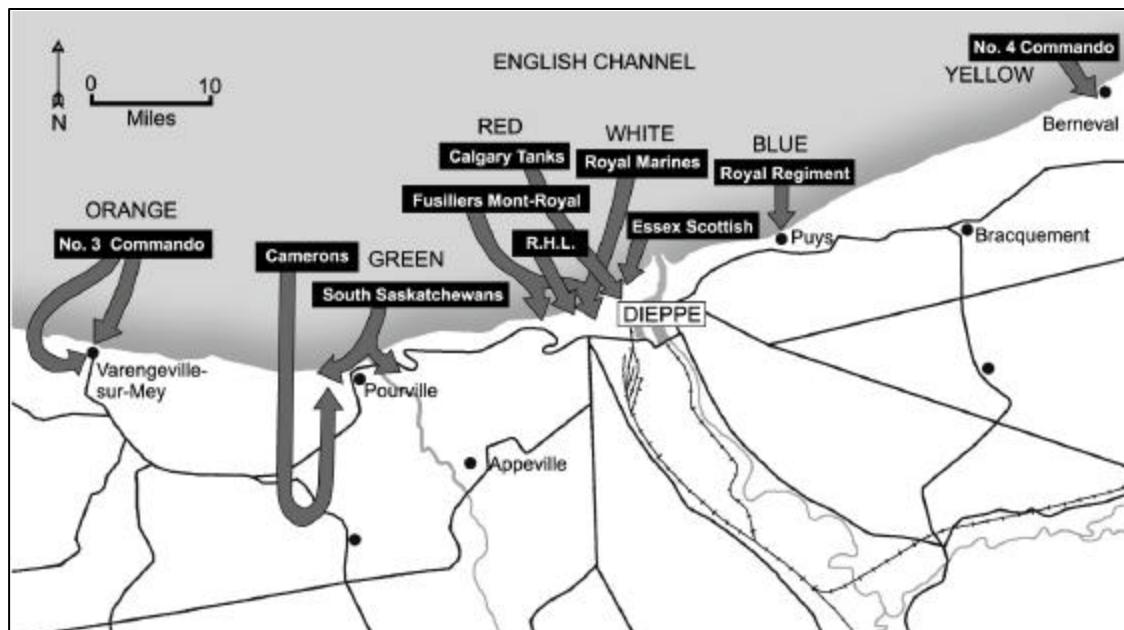
Changes to the JUBILEE plan first addressed the concern of secrecy, given that a large number of troops had been briefed just prior to cancellation of RUTTER and were now "at large" in various bases around England. The Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division departed the Isle of Wight, the staging area for RUTTER, and returned to its former bases. The planners decided that further intensive assault training was unnecessary and decided that embarking troops would depart directly from their bases and move to embarkation ports for the assault, thereby minimizing the risk of discovery by agents, or German aerial reconnaissance. The new plan also eliminated the airborne operation phase of the raid, and replaced the furthest flank assaults with British commandos. Commandos would be affected less by weather and illumination thus eliminating the chance of another postponement. Unfortunately, two key aspects of the operation that did not change were the requirement for a heavy bombardment prior to landing, and significant naval gunfire to support the landings. Admiral Baillie-Grohman, the naval force commander for RUTTER continued to comment on the naval gunfire support plan. Admiral Mountbatten subsequently saw to it that Baille-Grohman found other employment on the staff of Admiral Ramsey and replaced him with Hughes-Hallett. General Montgomery, who as noted earlier, felt the operation should have been "cancelled for all time," left to assume command of the British Eighth Army in North Africa. General McNaughton, the senior Canadian officer became the "responsible commander" for the new Dieppe plan, although he subsequently delegated operational responsibility to General Crerar, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps commander. The chain-of-command was now all Canadian, McNaughton down to Crerar, to General Ham Roberts, the raid commander.

#### **19 AUGUST, 1942: "A VISIT TO THE POOR MAN'S MONTE CARLO"**

H-hour for the raid was set for 04:50 hours, 19 August, though due to lack of sea room and trained landing craft crews, the four flank attacks at YELLOW, BLUE, GREEN, and ORANGE beaches were to be launched half an hour ahead of the main attack, at RED and WHITE beaches.

Brigadier Churchill Mann, earlier one of the key planners and now serving as the Deputy Commander of the raid, explained the concept as follows: (See map for assault locations by color)

On the far left, (YELLOW beach) British commandos were to destroy the gun battery at Berneval. Landing at Puys, (BLUE beach) the Royal Regiment and a company of the Black Watch were to destroy guns on the Eastern Headland overlooking Dieppe harbor. On the extreme right, (ORANGE beach) commandos were to destroy Varengeville battery. At Pourville (GREEN beach), the South Saskatchewan Regiment was to land astride the River Scie. Thirty minutes later the Cameron Highlanders would advance through the Saskatchewan's beachhead, move inland, join tanks from Dieppe and assault an airdrome (St. Aubin) and a German Divisional headquarters believed to be at Arques. There were to be two other attacks at H-hour plus 30 minutes. On the left, half of the beach at Dieppe (RED beach), the Essex Scottish and the Calgary Regiment were to land simultaneously and advance rapidly into the town to secure the harbor area for engineer demolitions. On the right half of the Dieppe beach (WHITE beach), the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI) would land with other Calgary tanks and move through the town to secure exits for other tanks to proceed inland where they could join the Camerons. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal were to land later, occupying the perimeter of the town after the Essex and the RHLI had seized it. All Canadian units were to withdraw across the main Dieppe beaches, with the Fusiliers Mont-Royal serving as rearguard.<sup>19</sup>



History shows that from the beginning, the complex plan for Dieppe, which was heavily reliant on timing in the assault phase would begin to unravel as 237 ships began to position for the assault. General Ham Roberts, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian division and the designated assault commander had 6,100 troops under his command, 4963 of which were Canadian and 1,075 British. There were approximately 50 troops of all ranks from the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Ranger battalion who were dispersed among various units as observers. These Rangers, organized by Colonel Lucian Truscott in late 1941 and early 1942, would be among the first Americans to see combat on the European continent. In general, the assaults on the beaches were carried out in battalion-size strength with a battalion in reserve afloat. A Royal Marine company would be included in the afloat reserve but would never land in the assault. Since the planners had sacrificed overwhelming naval fire support and adequate preparation of the amphibious assault area by air, the only tactical advantage left to the assaulting forces was surprise, some smoke screens disseminated by aircraft, and a few "gun runs" by cannon-firing aircraft. The German order of battle included a heavy commitment of artillery ranging from batteries of 5.9 inch coastal batteries, to the heavy 155 mm guns on the flanks of the attack. German infantry also operated assorted anti-tank weapons and French 75mm guns in and around the beach area. The German commander, Generalleutnant Conrad Haase, had sighted his artillery in such a manner that it provided mutually supporting fires on four of the six beach areas, (Green, Red, White, and Blue). In personnel, General Haase commanded the 571<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, a brigade equivalent with three battalions of infantry, a divisional artillery battalion, two engineer companies, and various other minor units, including Luftwaffe units manning lighter caliber artillery and AAA guns. The strength of this force was largely underestimated by Allied intelligence and their camouflaged dispositions were undetected by aerial photography. Many of the gun positions were located in cliff sides and various caves, particularly in the two large high ground areas on either flank of the main beaches of Dieppe proper. These headlands as they were known, would pour heavy enfilading fire down on the Canadians as they disembarked from their landing craft. A summary of what occurred at each point of assault follows:

#### YELLOW BEACH (BERNEVAL)

Landing craft with No.3 Commando aboard, meet a German naval convoy steaming South toward Dieppe. A sharp firefight ensued and six of the R-boats (small wooden landing craft) are immediately sunk. Several other landing craft disperse in confusion and head back to England. A total of six landing craft eventually land 25 minutes late on YELLOW beach and No.3 Commando begins its mission of taking out the heavy 155 mm guns of the "Goebbels Battery."

Half of the surviving landing party landed directly under the cliffs of YELLOW Beach while the other half was to circle behind and engage from the rear. The Eastern half of the Dieppe defensive sector, to include German defenders at Puys, (BLUE Beach) alerted by the confrontation at sea with the German naval convoy were waiting as the commandos landed. Commandos who landed below the cliffs were trapped and decimated by small arms fire. Only 20 of those on the beach escaped back to the landing craft. Another 82 were captured on the beach. Although the Goebbels battery was never completely destroyed, the men of No.3 Commando with the responsibility of attacking from the rear, effectively diverted the gun crews and kept them from firing on other landing areas and ships of the fleet. Three hours after landing, the remaining commandos withdrew to the beach and boarded landing craft to make their escape. Major Peter Young, the commando leader who led the assault from the rear was later cited for bravery and is credited for taking part in one of the few successes of the day.

#### BLUE BEACH (PUYS)

The Royal Regiment of Canada's landing at BLUE beach, another flank attack and the most crucial to the success of the main Dieppe attack, was a bloody debacle. The first wave of the "Royals" with the critical mission of capturing the Eastern headlands with its formidable positions on top, landed 20 minutes later than planned when the effects of the smoke screens and darkness had been entirely lost. The German defenders, comprising only two platoons and some technicians, were fully alert. The local commander had countermanded the customary 'stand-down' order at dawn after hearing the naval encounter offshore. Nowhere was the fire more intense than at BLUE beach.<sup>20</sup>

The beach area was only 200 yards wide and covered by two pill boxes and several machine gun nests. As the first wave of landing craft came in, the craft were raked with heavy fire from both sides of the beach and a gully directly ahead. A seawall afforded the only protection, however, as the ramps of the landing craft came down, troops were mowed down in large numbers. As subsequent craft came in, the beach had become a grisly scene of death and destruction. Young, inexperienced soldiers hesitated, and soon began refusing to disembark onto the beach and certain death. In a written report Lieutenant W.C. Hewitt, officer in charge of the flotilla wrote, "...When the soldiers started to jump on the beach everything opened up. A number of casualties occurred before the troops reached the shelter of the wall. This discouraged the rest from landing and only a firm handling of the situation by the naval officers in charge of each landing craft succeeded in compelling the rest to follow their comrades, revolvers having to be used as a threat."<sup>21</sup> "Of the 554 men of the Royal Regiment who landed at BLUE beach, 65 came back only 32 of them unwounded. In slightly more than three hours of war the Regiment suffered 94.5% casualties."<sup>22</sup>

### GREEN BEACH (POURVILLE)

The intent of the landing at GREEN beach was for the South Saskatchewan Regiment (SSR) to land astride the river Scie which ran through Pourville into the channel, secure the West headland, and neutralize artillery emplacements on top of the headland covering the main beaches of Dieppe. The SSR, with special technicians attached, was to also capture a radar site on the headland, strip it of important components and bring them back to England. Once these missions were accomplished, the Cameron Highlanders were to land, pass through the SSR and link up with the Calgary Tank Regiment in the rear area to assault the airfield and headquarters complex near St. Aubin. This mission was intended to mirror the failed mission at BLUE beach, thereby creating a large perimeter around the Dieppe area as the main assault at RED and WHITE beaches was concluding. The SSR made good its landing at GREEN beach having taken the German garrison somewhat by surprise, however, instead of landing astride of the river Scie, the regiment landed entirely to the West of the river and the elements responsible for assaulting the headland had to fight their way through the town of Pourville. "Of the 523 officers and men who landed, 355 returned to England, more than half of them wounded."<sup>23</sup> The Cameron Highlanders landed on Green beach approximately 30 minutes late-- and in the wrong location. The Camerons, who had been designated to land on the Western side of the river Scie, landed astride the river as had been planned for the SSR. GREEN beach became a confused mixture of the two regiments, both attempting now to reorganize and accomplish their respective missions. The Camerons on the Eastern side of Pourville attached themselves to the SSR and those on the Western side moved South along the Western bank of the River Scie in an attempt to link up with the Calgary Tanks. After moving South and discovering that the Calgary Tanks had never made it off the main beaches of Dieppe, the Camerons encountered the vanguard of the German 571<sup>st</sup> Regiment's reserve arriving to reinforce the beaches. The Camerons began to retreat back toward GREEN beach and while enroute, received the general signal for evacuation of all beaches. As men from both the SSR and the Camerons began collecting on the beach, the scene became reminiscent of Dunkirk. The Germans poured merciless fire down on the beach killing nearly 100 men of the SSR and later capturing another 89.

### ORANGE BEACH (VARENGEVILLE-SUR-MER)

Actions at ORANGE beach undoubtedly were the most successful of the entire Dieppe operation. No.4 Commando, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lord Shimi Lovatt, landed his 250 commandos at 0450 hours with the mission of destroying the formidable "Hess battery" at

the far Western extreme of the operational area. Lovatt divided his force with one commando force landing directly to the front of the battery and a larger force circling to the rear of the position. At 0620 hours, both forces assaulted the position and destroyed the battery killing over 40 Germans and wounding another 28. By 0730 hours, Lovatt and his commandos were embarking on landing craft and heading back to England. Total casualties of the commando force of 252, were 46 killed, wounded, or missing.

#### RED AND WHITE BEACH (DIEPPE)

The two main attacks on the main beaches of Dieppe were to begin at H-hour plus 30 minutes. On the left half of the beach at Dieppe (RED beach), the Essex Scottish and a portion of the Calgary Tank Regiment were to land simultaneously and advance rapidly into the town to secure the harbor area for engineer demolitions. On the right half of the Dieppe beach (WHITE beach), the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI) would land with another detachment of the Calgary unit and move through the town to secure exits for tanks to proceed inland where they could join the Camerons. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal were to land later, occupying the perimeter of the town after the Essex and the RHLI had seized it. As noted earlier, only two of the four flanking attacks, those conducted by No. 3 and 4 Commandos at ORANGE and YELLOW beaches were the only phases of the assault that were successful. Because actions at BLUE and GREEN beaches failed in their attempt to neutralize German heavy guns, the Germans were free to direct lethal firepower down onto RED and WHITE beaches. In addition, poor intelligence had failed to recognize a number of gun positions placed in and along the East and West headland cliffs. As the RHLI and the Essex Scottish landed, cannon mounted Hurricane fighter-bomber aircraft were just finishing their strafing runs and began to depart. The smoke designed to obscure the landing lasted only a short time and as the landing craft lowered their ramps to disembark the assault troops, the German automatic weapons opened fire with deadly accuracy. To make matters worse, the first chalk of nine Churchill tanks from the Calgary Regiment that were to provide critical fire support were 15-20 minutes late in landing. "Fifty-eight tanks were supposed to land on the main beach, but only 29 did. Of these, twelve Churchill's lost their treads on the stone [another failure in intelligence] or were disabled by anti-tank fire."<sup>24</sup> Engineer Sappers who were to play a critical role in breaching the wire obstacles and blowing holes in the sea wall for the tanks were cut down immediately as they tried to perform their missions. They would suffer 90% casualties that day, more than any other type unit in the attack. The only cover available on the beach for troops was the sea wall and depressions in the rocky beach. Some small units eventually made their way across the wide esplanade into a pre-

war Casino fronting the main beaches, however with the exception of a few forays into the town by individuals no further progress was made by the attacking force. During this time, General Ham Roberts who had endured a near-total breakdown of communications since the first action began, received another partial transmission from WHITE beach that indicated the Casino was taken and units were moving into town. Roberts decided to reinforce success and committed the Fusiliers Mont Royal to support Essex Scottish. The regiment was immediately pinned down upon landing. Meanwhile, in the skies over Dieppe the largest air battle of the war continued to rage on. During the early hours of the attack six squadrons of British and Canadian aircraft provided cover for the landings. By the time the reembarkation order came, every Luftwaffe base in France and Holland was alerted to engage in the combat over Dieppe. Over 900 German aircraft would take part in the air battle, but despite post-attack propaganda efforts by the Allies touting a significant victory, the tally of lost pilots that day would reach 60 with 106 aircraft destroyed. The British and Canadians had wanted to draw the German Luftwaffe out for a major battle, but came out on the short end. The Germans lost 48 fighters and bombers, with another 23 damaged.

At 9:40 a.m. the code word, "Vanquish" was ordered by General Roberts. This was the signal to begin evacuation of all the beaches.

Throughout Vanquish, the naval officers conducted the withdrawal with unbelievable dash and courage. Under devastating fire, they fearlessly brought their LCA's and LCM's in to the beaches time after time to rescue the men of Second Division infantry units. Some of the craft were sunk by shell fire. Some craft were swamped, but still the navy persisted in their efforts to evacuate the maximum number despite the horrendous casualties.<sup>25</sup>

At 1 p.m. another code word, "Vancouver", signaled the entire naval force to head back to England. From the beaches of Dieppe, over 2000 men watched the last British vessel disappear over the horizon; 1,874 of these were Canadian. The remainder were commandos or personnel from the Royal Navy. Operation JUBILEE was over.

## **CONCLUSION**

As stated in the beginning of this paper, the raid on Dieppe received an inordinate amount of attention given the size of the operation in the grand scheme of World War Two. The tragedy that was Dieppe left a deep impression on the Canadian people that is still debated to this day. Historians and veterans alike fall all along the spectrum in their views, ranging from the operation being a sacrificial offering of Canada's sons to political whim, to a brave and honorable sacrifice that paved the way to victory at Normandy. There is little doubt that tactically, with a few exceptions, most notably the commando operations on the flanks and air

operations in general, that Dieppe was an abject failure. However, if one examines the strategic consequences of the operation a different conclusion is drawn. First recall the situation that Winston Churchill faced in the Summer of 1942. The Americans were pressing for an early invasion of the continent with as many as 12 divisions while the Russians were pressuring both the British and the Americans for a second front. Dieppe became the solution. Churchill and his Chief of Staff Sir Alan Brooke were able to assuage the Americans (providing that there was American participation in the raid) and keep the Russians satisfied. "Churchill won a truce of sorts with the Russians and a firm entente with the Americans. Brooke's greatest feat [Brooke was an outspoken opponent of SLEDGEHAMMER] averting a premature invasion, was won on the Dieppe beaches. Both factors were a major factor in winning the war in Europe."<sup>26</sup> There is enough historical support to suggest that an invasion in 1943, for any number of reasons, would have been a catastrophe. More importantly, Churchill, by offering up Dieppe may have kept the Allies together and focused on the job at hand—defeating Germany.

Another strategic consequence to come out of Dieppe, came from faulty conclusions arrived at by the Germans. "They [the Germans] assumed that whereas the Allies would not be so foolish as to attempt another frontal assault, they would land on either flank of a port and then encircle it. From Dieppe onwards their defenses were reorganized and concentrated to cover likely invasion ports, thus weakening the defenses along open beaches where landings actually took place."<sup>27</sup> They also concluded that an assault could be destroyed at the moment of landing and therefore sacrificed defense in depth in order to reinforce the West Wall. Finally, not only were many German divisions kept tied down defending the channel coast for fear of another attempt at the continent, but in September 1942, Hitler ordered another 10 crack divisions from the Eastern front to the West Wall. "This was the turning point in his campaign against Russia, and in the war as a whole."<sup>28</sup>

Operationally and tactically there were many lessons learned from Dieppe, the need for overwhelming air and naval gunfire support being the most common lesson learned. Another concept, was the creation of the J-Force, ("J" stood for JUBILEE in honor of Dieppe) a specially trained and equipped naval force, expert in amphibious warfare with emphasis on carrying troops to assault landings. The concept of artificial harbors such the "Mulberry" made its debut at Normandy, and not coincidentally, Hughes-Hallett the naval force commander at Dieppe was involved in its conception. Tactically, the list of Dieppe-inspired innovation is long, with everything from specially designed assault tanks that swim, (known as DD, for Duplex Drive) to the concept of a tactical communication center, and Forward Air Controllers.

All the key leaders involved in the Dieppe operation went on to greater deeds. None was held accountable in any way for the disaster that befell the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian infantry division despite much reflecting and rationalizing over the years. The only exception was General J.H. "Ham" Roberts. "If there had to be an official scapegoat, what better one than a man of the stature of Major General Hamilton Roberts. He lost his division; he was never again to command troops in the field. He lost the respect of his men. Year after year, on 19 August, a small box would arrive in the post for him. Its contents: a small, stale piece of cake - - a cruel reminder of his morale-boosting pre-Dieppe comment: 'Don't worry boys...it will be a piece of cake.' Roberts bore his assigned role in silence and in dignity until his death. His only comment was 'History will exonerate me.'"<sup>29</sup>

WORD COUNT= 6927

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Veterans Affairs of Canada Website, The Raid on Dieppe, para.1, accessed on internet 25 October 2002, [www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm).

<sup>2</sup> Terrence Robertson, The Shame and the Glory (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1963), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>7</sup> R.W. Thompson, At Whatever Cost: The story of the Dieppe Raid (New York: Coward McCann Inc., 1957), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>9</sup> Brereton Greenhous, Dieppe, Dieppe, (Montreal: Editions Art Global, 1992), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Robertson, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>12</sup> BR1736 (26) Naval Staff History, Battle Summary No. 33: Raid on Dieppe, para.5, accessed on internet, 24 October 2002, [www.warships1.com/W-hist/HSII\\_Dieppe.htm](http://www.warships1.com/W-hist/HSII_Dieppe.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Greenhous., 39-40.

<sup>14</sup> Naval Staff History, para.6.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Loring Villa, Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Robertson, 127.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Greenhous, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Ian McCulloch, "Prelude to D-Day, Dieppe1942." Military Journal No. 3.1 (January 2001) Accessed on internet 6 Jan. 2003. [www.ospreypublishing.com/content1.php?cid=101](http://www.ospreypublishing.com/content1.php?cid=101).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>21</sup> Greenhous, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, 241.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>24</sup> Denis Whitaker, Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph (Toronto/Montreal: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1992), 252.

<sup>25</sup> Whitaker, 269.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson, 406-407.

<sup>28</sup> Whitaker, 301.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 290.

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